Inquiry into regulation of care for older people

Scottish Council on Deafness (SCoD)

The Scottish Council on Deafness represents organisations working with and on behalf of Deaf Sign Language users, Deafblind, Deafened (Acquired Profound Hearing Loss) and Hard of Hearing people in Scotland; and individuals who have an interest in deaf issues or are deaf themselves.

Our membership provides an effective working partnership between the Voluntary Sector, Social Work and Education Departments, NHS Trusts, Health Boards and the Government.

Background to Contribution

One in five of the population in Scotland has a hearing loss. This means there are over one million people in Scotland with a hearing loss, from the profoundly deaf to those who are hard of hearing. They have different communication needs.

There are approximately 6,000 deaf people whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL).

Many older deaf people do not have the same access to appropriate and accessible care either at home or in a residential setting as their hearing peers. Deaf people do not have equal access to information that enables them to be able to make informed choices in their later years about where they will live and what care they may require. When planning care services for older people, the needs of deaf people appear to be included in the term “sensory impairment” as “one-size-fits-all”, rather than people with very different and differing requirements – Deaf Sign Language users need BSL/English Interpreters to ensure appointments with care professionals are fully accessible and information on DVD in BSL and staff who are suitably qualified in BSL, whereas a person who is Deafened will need support from an Electronic Notetaker or a Palantypist to ensure that they fully understand what is happening during appointments and information in written English or their community language; and staff will have to have communication skills training to ensure they communicate effectively with the Deafened person. There is also a need to recognise the cultural aspects of the Deaf Community when planning and providing care services for older people.

Does the regulatory system ensure care services for older people are providing good quality and appropriate care?

Communication Support

SCSWIS (Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland) – previously the Care Commission Scotland – has only one inspector (based in the West of Scotland) who has the necessary BSL skills to engage professionally with
older Deaf/Deafblind BSL users. This raises the question about the viability or accuracy of any inspection reports covering residential homes or older people’s care services which may be working with Deaf/Deafblind BSL users.

Why is this so? Deaf BSL users who use care services or are in residential care should have access to BSL/English interpreters for meetings and appointments. If as was the case with the Care Commission, unannounced inspection visits are carried out, then will SCSWIS ensure that a BSL/English interpreter and an Electronic Notetaker are taken on every visit – just in case? Many service providers do not record the communication support needs of clients/service users as standard; therefore SCSWIS will not necessarily know whether or not the service they are inspecting will have Deaf BSL, Deafblind or Deafened service users/residents.

There are a higher percentage of older people who have a dual sensory impairment – Deafblindness. What measures are put in place by inspectors and inspection teams to ensure that appropriate communication support is in place during inspection visits to engage with these people?

Information

In the National Care Standards: Care Homes for Older People - http://www.nationalcarestandards.org/72.html#informing – it states:

“Deciding to move into a care home is a major decision, and you must have proper information to help you reach that decision. You can expect the information to be up-to-date and reliable, in a format and language that you can easily understand.”

In order to give accurate information, I contacted a number of Care Home providers to ask if they could, if asked provide information about their care homes in Scotland in British Sign Language.

The two responses I received were:

Southern Cross Healthcare – “it is our company policy not to take part in research.” But a member of staff in one of their homes in Glasgow told me that they do not have information about the home in BSL; but that they do have some staff with basic BSL skills.

Four Seasons Health Care Ltd – “we do not normally as a matter of routine provide this information in this format. Is this something you would like to see ourselves do or the care home sector in general?”

How do Deaf and Deafblind people make informed decisions about their own care in old age and that of their relatives if they cannot access information in BSL?

“Standard 3: Your legal rights - You have full information on your legal position about your occupancy rights in the care home. You are
confident that the home is run in line with legal requirements for health and safety, fire safety and food hygiene.

1. You receive a written agreement which clearly defines the service that will be provided. It sets out the terms and conditions of accommodation and residence, including your rights to live in the home, payment arrangements, and arrangements for changing or ending the contract. Your written agreement will also include an Annex which sets out all the options available should you or your representative wish to raise any concerns or make a complaint.

2. You have a copy of this written agreement in a format you can understand.”  

If care/residential homes do not provide general information in BSL for Deaf and Deafblind people, do they provide the agreement in BSL so that Deaf and Deafblind residents understand their occupancy rights?

Residential Care for Older People

Mainstream residential care for older Deaf, Deafblind and Deafened people is not accessible for a number of reasons, not simply because information is not available in BSL or that appropriate communication support is not available for meetings and appointments. Even if, in mainstream residential care homes, staff are fluent in BSL, how many fellow residents can communicate directly with a Deaf or Deafblind resident? And how many can communicate with a resident who is Deafened?

In 2010, Capability Scotland and the Glasgow Centre for Independent Living (GCIL) held an event with Deaf Connections to look at the housing needs of Deaf people. One of the discussion areas looked at the needs of older Deaf people:

“There was concern about the quality of care and availability of BSL users within residential care. One gentleman told the group that his wife lives in residential care and that her condition has worsened because staff cannot communicate with her. He explained that signing keeps the mind alert but because she has no opportunity to sign apart from when he visits her, she now has very little communication.”  

What is needed for Deaf and Deafblind people in Scotland is specialist residential care homes that provide a holistic deaf environment where staff can communicate directly with residents and are aware of the cultural needs of the people in their care; and residents whose first language was BSL.

Care at Home Services

How many of the care staff that provide “Care at Home” for deaf people have appropriate levels of BSL and the communication skills required to work with
Deaf, Deafblind and Deafened people? SCoD carried out a Social Work Skills Audit in 2009 to look at the deaf awareness of qualified social workers and other support staff who work in social work departments in Scotland. The two reports are available on the SCoD website at [http://www.scod.org.uk/Research-i-46.html](http://www.scod.org.uk/Research-i-46.html). Although this was not specifically about social work services for older people, the results highlight the lack of deaf awareness and communication skills training given to social workers and social work support staff. How do regulatory bodies assess the care at home given to deaf people if the staff are not deaf aware nor do they have the necessary communication skills to work with deaf people in their own homes?

**Good Practice**

Hayfield Support Services with Deaf People work with Deaf adults with disabilities or difficulties from the age of 16 upwards. They presently have five residents over the age of 65 and another one over 60 years and several in their 50s. Hayfield was previously regarded as a ‘rehabilitation’ service, with the aim of preparing Deaf people for some degree of independent living, but over the years they have admitted people with increasingly complex needs who realistically will never be able to live independently, and so they changed the name and focus of their overall service provision to acknowledge that they are in effect providing a home-for-life for some of the people that they work with (while still trying to help most of the deaf people they work with to move towards more independent living). All staff have the communication skills necessary to work with Deaf people with additional needs as well as being fully deaf aware. Residents can communicate directly with each other. The physical aspects of the home are fully accessible to the Deaf residents and their family/friends. Hayfield’s inspection reports over a number of years and covering a range of services, including the care of elderly people, have invariably been very positive. Contact for Hayfield Support Services with Deaf People – Judy Byrne, Director - judy.byrne@hayfield.org.uk Telephone/Textphone: 0141 429 0335.

**Fear of the future**

Many Deaf and Deafblind people in Scotland have a genuine fear that in the future they will be isolated from their community and from other people due to the lack of understanding of their needs by the providers of residential care and “care at home” and the fact that so few care providers have any level of BSL. Deafened people also are scared of being isolated in their old age because of a lack of understanding of their needs.

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